9: Eppstein S-4 (no date) 1945 EC1 Hungary EC1

Hitler now prepared to invade Yugoslavia through Hungary, and called upon the Government in Budapest to give him facilities. Rewards were certainly promised for obedience, penalties for refusal. On 3 April 1941, when the German demands came before the Hungarian Government, the Prime Minister, Paul Teleki, although a devout Catholic, took his own life rather than commit so dishonourable an act; but the Regent did not follow his example and found a successor Bárdossy, to cover the shameful policy. Hungary not only let the German troops attack from her territory, but herself joined in the attack, being rewarded with part, although not all, of what she had lost to Yugoslavia through the Trianon Treaty (the Bačka, Baranya and two small areas in the west; the Yugoslav Banat was left to Serbia).

THE RUSSIAN 'CRUSADE'. In consequence of this, Britain broke off diplomatic relations with Hungary. Under Bárdossy's leadership, the Government was now completely subservient to Germany, and the final consequence of this was seen in June of the same year, when Hitler attacked Russia. Hungary had probably intended to remain neutral, but again pressure was brought to bear, again the Government's hand was forced, and again Bárdossy followed the suicidal policy to which he was committed, and Hungary embarked on the most fatal of all her adventures. In December, the British Empire and the U.S.A. declared war on Hungary. Although Hungary was now hopelessly committed to Germany and although the idea of a 'crusade against Bolshevism'

9: Eppstein S-4 (no date) 1945 EC1 Hungary EC1

had a certain appeal for the 'men of the counter-revolution' who still ruled the country, the war became unpopular enough as soon as it became clear that it was not to be a walk-over for the Germans and a trivial price for Hungary to pay for what she had previously received at Germany's hands. The German disaster at Stalingrad shook the Hungarians profoundly, and not long after it the forces which they themselves had reluctantly put in the field suffered a crushing defeat at Voronezh, where a great part of the Hungarian armies in the field and nearly all their heavy equipment were lost. A new Prime Minister, Kállay, tried painfully to find his way, at least part of the way, back. The bulk of the troops in Russia were recalled, the talk of a victorious crusade dropped. Towards Russia Hungary now protested that she was acting purely in self-defence and had not designs on a mile of territory; towards the Western Powers she claimed that she had no quarrel with them, and she tried by every means to convince them of the justice of her cause.

FALSE HOPES RAISED BY ITALIAN SURRENDER. If British and American troops had reached the frontiers of Hungary in 1943, the country would probably not have resisted, and a government might well have been found which would have turned, as Badoglio's Government in Italy turned, against Germany. It is no secret that the Left—the Socialists, Smallholders and others—to whom Kállay allowed a great deal of freedom, wished this course to be taken as soon as the debacle in Italy occurred. But the Western Allies remained

9: Eppstein S-4 (no date) 1945 EC1 Hungary EC1

fighting a difficult campaign in Southern Italy, and the half-hoped-for British landing in the Balkans did not occur. Soviet Russia was a different proposition in the eyes of the Government; and even Russia was still far from the frontiers of Hungary. The only Power on her doorstep was Germany. Meanwhile in the country the pro-German party redoubled its propaganda to show how terrible would be the results for Hungary of an Allied victory: Russo-Soviet influence over all Central Europe, Czech hegemony in it, a new and worse Trianon. Kállay could not make up his mind to do more than hesitate, and at last even his hesitation grew too much for the Germans. In March 1944, there was another crisis; more threats to the Regent, who yielded again. German troops marched into the country, Kállay took shelter in the Turkish Legation, a new and much more pro-German Government took office and once again, as after Teleki's suicide, the end of the period of double-dealing was proclaimed.

NAZI DOMINATION AND THE SHADOW OF DEFEAT. Of course, it was not the end. The new men had their way for a time. The leaders of the Left were interned, the Labour movement brought under new Fascist control, the Press disciplined. Above all, a violent persecution set in of the Jews, to whom the earlier governments, even Bárdossy's, had allowed a degree of freedom and protection unparalleled in German-controlled Europe. In a few short, dreadful weeks the Nazi's Hungarian henchmen inflicted fearful sufferings on the Jews, undoing all the good which their predecessors had

9: Eppstein S-4 (no date) 1945 EC1 Hungary EC1

They occupied Budapest with German and pro-German Hungarian troops, seized the Regent and, after issuing in his name a recantation of his proclamation and a deed of abdication, carried him off to Germany in 'protective custody'. Under their armed patronage the 'Arrow Cross', a band of fanatical extremists, seized power. They were headed by an ex-officer of Armenian descent named Szálasi, who proclaimed himself 'Leader of the Nation' and issued the order to fight to the last. Although the Arrow Cross comprised only a small minority of the people, it was able, with German help, to suppress resistance in the capital and in West Hungary; the fight went on, while behind the line, the Germans hurriedly stripped the country bare. Corn, cattle, the contents of stores, warehouses and shops, machinery, even workers, where they could be induced to move, were hurriedly transported to Germany.

Meanwhile, the Russians advanced swiftly. Soon they were at the gates of Budapest and by Christmas had encircled it. A frightful battle now took place. The Germans, whose only care was to gain time for the construction of new defences in the Reich itself, defended Budapest street by street, house by house. They were helped by raw, fanatical levies of the Arrow Cross, some of the men desperate refugees, and a few factory workers, affected by the very Radical character of the Government's propaganda, and a few units of the Hungarian Army. Meanwhile, the wretched population, swollen by refugees to nearly 2,000,000, starving and deprived of light, heat and even water, lurked in cellars waiting for the end. When at last

9: Eppstein S-4 (no date) 1945 EC1 Hungary EC1

the capital was cleared of its defenders, what had been the pride of generations of Hungarians, was a mere smoking heap of ruins. Of all the capitals of the belligerents, on either side, not one, except only Warsaw, has suffered so dreadfully as Budapest.

THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT. But the last act of this tragedy was not altogether without hope. Even while Budapest was undergoing its death-agony, news came from Debreczen—the historic city of Eastern Hungary in which Kossuth had proclaimed the separation of Hungary from Austria in 1849—that a new Provisional National Assembly, elected by local Resistance Councils and the liberated towns and villages, had met and had appointed a Provisional Government. The most prominent figures in it were high serving officers, two of whom had crossed over to the Russians in obedience to the Regent's proclamation of 15 October 1944, while the third had headed the armistice delegation to which the proclamation referred. The other members of the Government were drawn chiefly from the democratic and pro-Allied parties, which under the recent regime had been working underground, preparing for such a day as this. There were Smallholders, Social Democrats, Communists and some progressive non-Party men, including the son of Paul Teleki, who had committed suicide in 1941 in the hope of saving his country.[1]

[1] The reported composition of the Government, which certainly seemed representative enough, was as follows: *Prime Minister*, Gen. Bela Miklós de Dálnok (a Transylvanian Szekler not hitherto known in politics); *Under-*

9: Eppstein S-4 (no date) 1945 EC1 Hungary EC1

U.S.S.R. and with the other United Nations, and with Hungary's neighbours. Its Premier, General Miklós, denounced the German influences which led Hungary into so many fatal adventures, and his colleagues promised social reforms which, if they could be carried through, would alter radically the whole structure of the country and make possible for it a new life. If the land of Hungary were fairly distributed among its people, so as to create a peasant class such as exists elsewhere in South-Eastern Europe; if the workers could become strong, free and independent; if political institutions could be made free and democratic, then it would no longer be possible to look on Hungary as a foreign body in Europe ruled by a caste whose mentality, social and political outlooks and ambitions disturbed the peace of South-Eastern Europe and proved a formidable obstacle to its solidarity.

The new Government was formed under Soviet auspices and welcomed by Moscow and in other quarters. But Hungary's troubles are, of course, not yet over. She has many very heavy trials ahead of her, both political and economic.

Right up to the summer of 1944, both the country and the people of Hungary had suffered, physically, less than most European states. The Hungarian Army had done comparatively little fighting and its losses had been correspondingly small. It had suffered one great disaster, at Voronezh, but after that Kállay had insisted on limiting further Hungarian military operations in Russia to the minimum. Budapest was hardly bombed before the spring of 1944, when the Allies

9: Eppstein S-4 (no date) 1945 EC1 Hungary EC1

made a series of attacks on the traffic points and military installations on the outskirts of the city.

Luxuries[1] had, of course, soon become unobtainable for most of the people, but the supply of the necessities of life was fairly well maintained up to the summer of 1944. Clothes, other textiles and boots and shoes were in short supply but not absolutely lacking, and most of the essential foods were available in sufficient, although not luxurious, quantities.

But this position was only made possible by drawing dangerously on reserves and mortgaging the future. The fields were exhausted by over-cropping and under-manuring. The animal population had dwindled dangerously. The scanty stock of agricultural machinery, and even of ordinary implements and tools, had begun to run low and could not be replenished. Moreover, labour shortage on the land had become acute, in consequence of mobilization.

In the factories, much machinery was turned over to war production. This would need to be reconverted for peace production. There was little replacement of worn-out machinery for a full five years. The transport system was also getting worn out. There was a general and growing housing shortage.

But all this would still have left Hungary in a position which most Continental countries could have envied if the war had not reached her in the autumn of 1944. When it did come, it came very severely. The Soviet armies were able to sweep through Rumania. In most parts of Yugoslavia the fighting was on the guerilla scale, except along

[1] [during World War II--Analyst]